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MONASTIC AND CONVENTUAL INSTITUTIONS.

SPEECH

DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

BY

C. N. NEWDEGATE, Esq., M.P.,

(NORTH WARWICKSHIRE)

ON THE 3RD DAY OF MARCH, 1865.

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MR. NEWDEGATE

ON

MONASTIC AND CONVENTUAL INSTITUTIONS.

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

FRIDAY, MARCH 3rd, 1865.

On the order of the day being read for the House to go into Committee of Supply,

Mr. NEWDEGATE moved that a select committee be appointed to inquire into the existence, character, and increase of monastic or conventual establishments, or societies, in Great Britain. He said:—It will be in the recollection of the House that on the 8th of April last I ventured to make a motion in the House for a committee to inquire into the case of a Mr. Smee, detailed in a petition which I presented to the House, with reference to certain circumstances connected with the last illness, burial, and the disposal of the property of a Mr. Hutchison, a relation of his, who became a member of the Society of St. Philip Neri, or Society of Oratorians, which has an establishment at Brompton, and also had a burial-ground at St. Mary's, Sydenham. It was alleged on that occasion that this case was to be adjudged by the tribunals of the country, and a circumstance occurred which tended to divert the attention of the House from the conclusion of the motion which I then made, which going beyond the immediate case presented by the petition of Mr. Smee, proposed to inquire into the conventual and monastic institutions, which have increased so largely in this country. It happened that Mr. Smee, without consulting me, without my knowledge, and without my consent, although he had placed his case in my hands, addressed a letter to the Duchess of Norfolk, and printed and circulated that letter the day before without my knowledge or consent. Perhaps no member of

this House had more reason to complain of that proceeding than myself. I had no opportunity of replying on that occasion; but I now beg to assure the House that that letter was printed and circulated without my knowledge or consent. I allude to this circumstance because great use was made of that letter for the purpose of diverting the attention of the House from the more extended matter of my motion; and upon a division, in consequence, I may say, to a great extent, of the circulation of that letter, the motion was defeated. I am happy to say, however, that the House afterwards gave me reason to believe that the circumstances which I had adduced connected with the burials in the burial-ground at Sydenham—the inaccurate description of the dead, and the non-registration of the burials—were circumstances worthy of the attention of the Legislature, for I have this proof, that the hon. and learned member for Guildford introduced a bill for the registration of burials conducted in cemeteries other than those of the Church of England. That bill passed both Houses of Parliament by unanimous consent, and is now the law of the land. The House will excuse me for adverting to this fact, because I wish to show them that when I venture to make a motion in this House it is never done for the mere purpose of agitation, far less for purposes of party triumph, but with an honest intention of effecting an improvement in the law and performing my duty as an independent member, by suggesting matters to the House which I respectfully deem worthy of their consideration. And this was the case on that occasion. During the debate to which I have referred allusion was necessarily made to this Society of Oratorians, and a petition was presented from the Rev. Mr. Harrison, of Bugbrook, in Northamptonshire, complaining that his son, a minor, when captain of the school at Westminster, had been seduced—I use the term advisedly—into that establishment contrary to his parental authority, had been kept there in defiance of his parents' will, and had been induced to enter that monastic order, for such I must term it, to the detriment of his prospects in life. I know not why, but the Committee on Public Petitions have not thought proper to print this petition in their report. I must express my surprise, for a more important petition has seldom been presented to the House. It was presented by the hon. member for Northamptonshire, the representative of this injured gentleman, and it is with the consent of his family that I now ask permission of the House to read this petition. It runs thus:—

"That on the 1st of March, 1861, your petitioner's son was captain of the Westminster School, and would in the course of a few weeks have obtained his election to a junior studentship at Christ's Church, Oxford.

"That up to Sunday, the 3d of March, in the same year, your petitioner's son had never held the slightest communication whatever with any Roman Catholic priest; that at one o'clock on that day he was introduced to

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Father John Bowden, a priest of the Oratory, at Brompton, to be shown, as he supposed, over that establishment; that he was detained in the Oratory by various invitations and by other circumstances for the remainder of the day, and was finally baptized at nine o'clock the same night, with the knowledge and consent of the Superior of the said Oratory, and for the express purpose of debarring your petitioner from the exercise of his just rights and authority as a parent.

"That your petitioner's son was at that very time in an infirm state of health, and was actually under medical treatment; that after his confession in Father Bowden's room at a quarter before nine o'clock at night, he felt so prostrated as to be obliged to lie down on a sofa; and that he was unwell and suffering from headache at the time of his baptism.

"That in a letter addressed to his sister on the 8th of March your petitioner's son described his reception into the Church of Rome as a sin, and as having been obtained by fraudulent means.

"That your petitioner, on the removal of his son from Westminster, renewed the expression of his intention to educate him for the Indian civil service, which offer he seemed inclined to accept, but that the Superior or other Fathers of the Oratory, offered him (as your petitioner is credibly informed) £100 per annum if he would become a postulant for the noviciate in their establishment.

"That in consequence of the infirm state of his health your petitioner's son, shortly after his removal from Westminster School, was sent by your petitioner to reside for several weeks with a relation at the seaside, where everything necessary for his health and comfort was most amply supplied; that the Superior of the Oratory gave him three pounds to enable him to go to the Oratory whenever he pleased, notwithstanding your petitioner's most positive commands to the contrary.

"That your petitioner's son did go to the Oratory before the time fixed for the expiration of his visit; that he became a postulant, and was permitted to commence his noviciate some months before his 19th year, notwithstanding the strong letter of remonstrance your petitioner wrote to the Superior, in which he forbade such a violation of parental authority.

"Your petitioner therefore humbly prays your honourable House to inquire into the truth of the above allegations, and to adopt such measures as to your wisdom shall seem meet for the protection of families and the vindication of parental authority."

The petition is signed "J. H. Harrison."

This petition has not, I think, received the attention which it ought. The House will, therefore, excuse me—as I was consulted by that gentleman before he prepared the petition, as I recommended him to seek legal advice in order that it might bear the strictest investigation, and as I know he accepted my advice—if I say that

I think that petition worthy of the attention of the House. (Hear, hear.) I wish now to advert to another circumstance connected with the debate of last session, to which I have referred, since, as I have said, I had no power or opportunity of reply. During that debate the late Attorney-General for Ireland (Mr. O'Hagan) said:—

"Every one belonging to his religious creed (that is, the Roman Catholic) knew that, which it was no shame to the hon. member for North Warwickshire if he did not know, the constitution of the community at Brompton did not in the smallest degree bring them within the purview of the law. Persons who belonged to the Oratory at Brompton—those who belonged to any community of that distinguished Order—were not bound by vows such as the hon. member appeared to suppose. It was a matter of perfect notoriety that they lived together in community; they were secular priests associating voluntarily, not bound to remain together for a single hour, each holding his property, and able to dispose of it just as he desired."

Now, that statement was in accordance with the evidence afterwards adduced before the courts in this country, and it was the paraphrase, and contained the substance of the evidence adduced in 1855 before the Provincial Court of Genoa, in Italy, when the constitution of this very Order was tested by that tribunal for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Order came within the law for the suppression of monasteries in Italy; and the Court, in the first instance, decided that that description of the Order was correct, and acted upon the supposition that these Oratorians had been wrongly included in the decree which was to give effect to the law passed by the Italian Legislature in 1855 for the suppression of the convents and monasteries of Jesuits, Franciscans, and other regular Orders of the Church of Rome in Italy. But the following year this question was raised again by appeal in the same Provincial Court of Genoa, and that Court finally decided that the Order of Oratorians came within the provisions of the law of 1855—that the decree for giving effect to that law correctly included that Order; and, to the best of my belief, as that decision was considered final, that Order is suppressed as being one of the regular Orders of the Church of Rome, although not, perhaps, coming technically and strictly within the provisions of the Act of 1829—the Act for the Relief of Roman Catholic Disabilities. I wish to make these statements to the House because the conduct of the Oratorians in the case of Miss M'Dermot has excited so much attention, and is not unlikely to come before the courts again. It has already been investigated before the magistrates; and it is, I think, important that the House should know that the Italian Parliament and Government, who must have been more cognisant of and possessed more knowledge on these subjects than the late Attorney-General for Ireland thought the hon. member for North Warwickshire possessed, have decided that this

is one of the Orders which it is expedient for the welfare of the Italian people should be suppressed. I have ventured to ask the House to appoint a committee in the terms of my motion, and for this reason. It is notorious to every one that of late years there has been a most enormous and, I may say, unprecedented increase in those monastic and conventual establishments in this country. Let me show the House exactly what I ask. Last session I gave notice for a return which should include some information as to the locality of these establishments, the character of their inmates, and the nature of their organisation. The right hon. gentleman the Secretary for the Home Department told me that I should find this information in documents in the Registrar-General's office. I have applied, but there are no such documents in the possession of the Registrar-General. Well, then, this House, acting in the spirit of the law of 1829, takes cognisance of convents of women, in the terms of the Act, as establishments the existence of which are at least recognised, if not protected. These same clauses in the Act of 1829 strictly prohibit the establishment in this country of the seminaries or houses of the Jesuits, and of the other male Orders of the Church of Rome; and I will call the recollection of the House to this fact, that these clauses of the Act of 1829 are recited and re-enacted in the Act of 1860 for the protection and due administration of Roman Catholic charities. Therefore, let the House remember that by its own act these clauses are not obsolete, but were revived only five years ago. Well then it is urged, "Oh, but these are private establishments, especially the convents, with which the Legislature has no more right to deal, and of which it takes no more cognisance than of establishments consisting of families of Roman Catholics, or of families belonging to any other denomination." Now, look at what you have done. You have provided for the due administration of property belonging to these convents as though it were possessed by a quasi corporation. You have forbidden the acquisition of property by the male monastic Orders in any such character; and by the act of last session you have provided for the registration of burials within the precincts of these monasteries and convents. I say then that the plea that these are private institutions in the sense in which they have been described as similar to private families comes too late. That interpretation is adverse to the sense of every Roman Catholic country. In France there are strict provisions for the regulation of these establishments. The Mayor of the Arrondissement has a direct power of visitation. The law provides that monastic vows shall not be binding for more than five years. Then take the case of Prussia. Here the law has been very much relaxed since 1850. Formerly there were strict provisions for the regulation of these places; but they are still kept within the cognisance of the State. The present form of the administration in Prussia so nearly and so practically approaches the despotic form

of Government, that the power reserved to the Crown for the visitation of these places, and of judging whether admission to these establishments is justifiable, is found to be amply sufficient for every purpose of guarding the personal freedom and property of those who may think fit to consign themselves to them. Then, turning to Italy. Italy has found it necessary for the establishment of her freedom to suppress a large number of these monastic institutions, and for the sake of her morality to suppress many of the convents. Italy, in 1863, was but following the example of England at the time of the Reformation; the example of France in 1798, and the example of Spain, bigoted Spain, in 1837. And with this movement throughout the Continent, I trust the Parliament of England will forgive me if, in the face of the rapid increase of these establishments at this time, I call upon it to make some inquiry into the localities in which they are to be found, as to the character of the Orders by which they are held, and to include in that inquiry the nature of the discipline carried out within them. (Cheers.) To give the House some idea of the increase of these establishments, I find in England and Wales there were religious houses of men in 1841 but one; of convents, 16; of colleges, nine. But in 1851 there were religious houses of men 17; convents, 53; colleges, 10. And now how stands the account? In 1865 there are religious houses of men, 58; convents, 187; colleges, 10: and if to the account we add 14 convents for Scotland, there are 201 convents established in this country, and possessing, to my knowledge, in the midland counties, considerable real property as well as personal estate. I wish, in addressing myself to this subject, to say a few words in order to dispel the illusion that this motion is a mere ebullition of Protestant bigotry. I will recall for one moment the attention of hon. members to some passages in the history of their own country, which, I think, must have escaped their attention. I find in a work of Lord Lyttelton, the ancestor of the accomplished peer who now bears that name, that in the reign of Henry II. the rapid increase of these establishments—about as rapid as that which is now taking place—was considered a grievous detriment to the country. Lord Lyttelton says:—

"The great increase of religious houses must be reckoned among the evils of this age (Henry II). The author of the 'Notitia Monastica' computes the number of such houses built in England during the reigns of Henry I., Stephen, and Henry II., at no less than 300. And Mr. Inett asserts that more monasteries and other religious societies were founded in that kingdom during the single reign of Henry I. than in 500 years before. But he rightly observes that this was not peculiar to this nation. The high opinion of the merit of such foundations, infused into the minds of the laity by the divines of those days; the hopes of compounding in this manner with the Deity for the greatest offences; but more espe-

cially the liberty, granted by the Pope, of commuting for vows made to go to the holy wars by benefactions of this kind, filled all Europe with convents. In the year 1152 the Cistercian order, which had been founded in 1098, had no fewer than 500. Among other causes of the increase of monasteries in this kingdom may be reckoned the civil war with which it was afflicted during the reign of King Stephen. For many of the nobility engaged in those troubles endeavoured to atone for the pillage of the people and other crimes they had committed by raising or endowing religious houses, and others desired to secure for themselves and their children a quiet asylum in these places. The pernicious consequences of such numbers of men and women being confined to a life of celibacy were grievously felt in the reign of Henry II., by continuing and increasing the depopulation of the country, which the commotions in that of his predecessor had occasioned. Nor was it a small inconvenience to the Government of this monarch in his disputes with the Pope, that he had so many persons in his realm, who, by their separation from society, and the nature of their institutions, were more devoted to the see of Rome than the secular clergy, which difference showed itself upon several occasions in the conduct of both. And the practice of exempting monks from the proper authority of the diocesan bishops increased this mischief."

Nothing towards abating these evils was done in the reigns of Henry III. or IV. Henry V., a Roman Catholic sovereign, found it necessary to suppress a great number of monasteries. In Kennett's "Cases of Impropriations," page 119, it is stated that—

"Had the monasteries been dissolved in Henry V.'s reign, when the bill was brought into Parliament for that purpose, it would have been more regularly and justly conducted than in an after reign; that by this would all have reverted to the parish churches, and the clergy would have gained as much by it as the Government. This appears from the sequel, that when the King, instead of the English monasteries, had only the alien priories given him, he seized on no part of the tithes, but on the lands and tenements that were before of lay fee, and might justly return into lay hands. These, too, he intended to have employed for breeding up a more learned clergy, declaring it was his design to found a college of divines and artists, and to settle upon the said college the lands of the alien priories dissolved, if he had not been prevented by death. In the first act of dissolution there was a saving to the interest of strangers, travellers, and poor, by binding the new possessors of any site or precinct of the religious houses to keep, or cause to be kept, an honest continual house and household in the same site or precinct."

. . . "In a preamble written by the King's own hand to another Act, it was declared to be an intent that the endowments of monasteries might be turned to better use, God's Word better set forth, children brought up in

learning, clerks nourished in the Universities, and exhibition for ministers of the Church. Divers of the visitors themselves did petition the King to leave some of the religious houses for the benefit of the country, and Latimer moved that two or three might be left in every shire for pious uses. I have seen an original letter from Latimer to the Lord Cromwell (Cleopatra, E. IV., fol. 264) to intercede with the King that Malvern Abbey might he left standing for the better performance of the duties of preaching, praying, and keeping hospitality."

Blackstone on the same subject observes that "the spirit of the nation being so much raised against foreigners, that about this time, in the reign of Henry V., the alien priories, or abbeys, for foreign monks were suppressed, and their lands given to the Crown. And no further attempts were afterwards made in support of these foreign jurisdictions." I will quote, besides, another historical authority which I wonder should have escaped the observation of the hon. and learned members of this House. I find in Hallam's "Middle Ages," vol. II., pages 366-7:—

"The virtues, indeed, or supposed virtues, which had induced a credulous generation to enrich so many of the monastic orders, were not long preserved. We must reject, in the excess of our candour, all testimonies that the middle ages present, from the solemn declaration of councils and reports of judicial inquiry to the casual evidence of common fame in the ballad or romance, if we would extenuate the general corruption of those institutions. In vain new rules of discipline were devised or the old corrected by reforms. Many of their worst vices grew so naturally out of their mode of life, that a stricter discipline could have no tendency to extirpate them. Such were the frauds I have already noticed, and the whole scheme of hypocritical austerities. Their extreme licentiousness was sometimes hardly concealed by the cowl of sanctity. I know not by what right we should disbelieve the reports of the visitation under Henry VIII., entering as they do into a multitude of specific charges, both probable in their nature, and consonant to the unanimous opinion of the world. Doubtless, there were many communities as well as individuals, to whom none of these reproaches would apply. In the very best view, however, that can be taken of monasteries, their existence is deeply injurious to the general morals of a nation. They withdraw men of pure conduct and conscientious principles from the exercise of social duties, and leave the common mass of human vice more unmixed. Such men are always inclined to form schemes of ascetic perfection which can only be fulfilled in retirement; but, in the strict rules of monastic life, and under the influence of a grovelling superstition, their virtue lost all its usefulness. They fell implicitly into the snares of crafty priests, who made submission to the Church not only the condition but the measure of all praise."

Again in Hallam's "Constitutional History," it is stated

what an enormous property these institutions possess, and in quoting the passage, I would remind the House that the figures he gives should be multiplied by seven or eight to ascertain the value in our present money. He says:—

"The income of the monasteries prior to their dissolution in the reign of Henry VIII. has been variously estimated. Dr. Lingard, on the authority of Nasmith's edition of 'Tanner's Notitia Monastica,' puts the annual revenue of all the monastic houses at £142,944. This would only be one-twentieth part of the rental of the kingdom if Hume were right in estimating that at three millions. But this is certainly by much too high. The author of 'Harmer's Observations on Burnet,' as I have mentioned above, says the monks will be found not to have possessed above one-fifth of the kingdom, and in value, by reason of their long leases, not one-tenth."

The same author (Hallam) having described the mode in which the monasteries were dissolved and the property appropriated, observes:—

"And better it had been that these revenues should thus from age to age have been expended in liberal hospitality, in discerning charity, in the promotion of industry and cultivation, in the active duties or ever generous amusements of life, than in maintaining a host of ignorant and inactive monks, in deceiving the populace by superstitious pageantry, or in the encouragement of idleness and mendicity."

I thank the House for having allowed me to read these short historical extracts; but what are the facts? Was the suppression of the monasteries previous to the Reformation the act of Henry VIII. alone? The other day, in a lecture at Bath, the Rev. Hobart Seymour, whose knowledge of the subject is scarcely exceeded by that of any one I am acquainted with, gave a full account of the process. It was in the reign of Henry VII., that eminently Catholic King, that Cardinal Morton, (an English cardinal) applied to the Pope for permission to reform a number of monasteries. I wrote to Mr. Seymour on this subject, and he sent me extracts from the bull and a copy of Cardinal Morton's letter addressed to the bishops in this country, and there is nothing in the reports made in the time of Henry VIII. which conveys in terms more explicit or more powerful clear evidence of the deep corruption which prevailed in these institutions. I should like, but I forbear, to read the terms in which the Pope's brief to Cardinal Morton is couched. Cardinal Morton, in his letter, declares that nuns were violated and murders committed in these convents and monasteries. And when I am told that the objections to the revival of these institutions which are so generally felt are the fruit of a mere Protestant prejudice, the House will forgive me if I recall these historical facts to the memory of Roman Catholic members, that it was an English cardinal who first proposed and that it was a Pope who first authorised

the suppression of the monasteries in the reign of Henry VIII. The Rev. H. Seymour, in his lecture at Bath on the 6th of February last, said :—

"It will be recollected that one of the measures that immediately preceded the Reformation of the Church of England was a measure for the suppression of the monasteries. That measure has been denounced by our Roman Catholic friends as a measure of robbery, and spoliation, and sacrilege; as a measure of such a character that none but a heretic could have devised it, and none but a tyrant could have sanctioned it. Perhaps, sir, they are nearer the mark than they themselves are aware, for that measure, whatever was its character was originally devised by a cardinal, and sanctioned by a Pope. (Hear, hear.) The facts of the case are these :—Cardinal Morton was Papal Legate in this country at the Court of Henry VII. He found the monasteries in such a state of demoralisation and disorganisation that he applied to the Pope for the requisite powers to amend and improve them. Pope Innocent VIII., then at Rome, immediately complied with the request, and issued his rescript or bull giving the requisite authority. But inveterate abuses take long to eradicate, and before the work had well begun Cardinal Morton lay in his grave, Henry VII. was gathered to his fathers, and Pope Innocent VIII. had gone the way of all flesh. We find next Cardinal Wolsey upon the scene as Papal Legate at the Court of Henry VIII. Cardinal Wolsey found some of the monasteries in a state of disorder—disorder in their finances, disorder in their morals—and he applied to the Pope for the requisite powers, not like his predecessor, to amend and reform, but to suppress the monasteries. (Hear, hear.) Pope Clement VII., then at Rome, immediately complied with his request, and issued his bull or rescript to the Cardinal Legate, authorising him, as he saw fit, to suppress all and every monastery in the whole realm of England. So that if this measure were a measure of robbery, and spoliation, and sacrilege, if it were a measure that none but a heretic could devise, and none but a tyrant could sanction, there is no truth more certain than that it was devised by Cardinal Wolsey, and sanctioned by Clement VII. (Hear, hear.) The Cardinal immediately proceeded to his work. He suppressed off-hand forty of the lesser monasteries, and with a part of the proceeds he endowed Christ Church, Oxford. Some of the larger monasteries, frightened by these proceedings, surrendered, and were suppressed, and the Cardinal was going lightly and jauntily on his course of suppression, when the great quarrel and confusion arose between the King and the Cardinal, and then with the Pope. In the midst of this confusion, which was a great day for England, we could see looming in the distance something that looked like rogues falling out, and honest men coming by their own; and Henry VIII., who was as shrewd a man as ever lived, fixed his hands on the Papal bull or rescript authorising the suppression of monasteries. These facts

seem to me to prove that the suppression of monasteries is not materially a Protestant measure, but that it is essentially a Roman Catholic measure." (Hear, hear.) Hon. members of the Roman Catholic persuasion forget that, when Henry VIII. succeeded to the throne, he was more eminently Roman Catholic, perhaps, than any sovereign of his time. Why, the Pope himself endowed him with the title of *Fidei Defensor*, for Henry, being an accomplished scholar, had written an answer to Luther. Henry VIII., through Cardinal Wolsey, applied for power to suppress the monasteries. The Cardinal agreed, and obtained the sanction and authority of the Pope to the measure; therefore, to tell any hon. member who, like myself, has been educated at Christ Church, Oxford, that this was not the fact—to tell the right hon. gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the college of which he is so bright an ornament was not established by funds derived from the source I have described, is really to presume on an incredible amount of ignorance and want of research. (Hear, hear.) Why, it was Cardinal Wolsey himself, the Pope's Legate, who took the funds from the monasteries to found Christ Church; and a blessed work it was. (Cheers and laughter.) Therefore, when I ask the House to pay some attention to the rapid growth of that which, in the deliberate judgment of two English cardinals, and two successive Popes, before the Reformation, was held to be a national disease, I hope hon. members will not think me presumptuous in expressing the strong public feeling which exists, that it is the duty of the Legislature to inform itself by its own inquiries with regard to an increase of these institutions, which causes so much uneasiness throughout the land. If the Legislature of England persistently ignores the existence of these establishments, and only trusts to the casual information which, with extreme difficulty, is procured as to certain malpractices that have come to light—if the Legislature continues in this state of wilful obtusity, why, it stands to reason that now, when the Roman Catholic countries of the Continent find it necessary to eject the inmates of these institutions from their shores, they will find a harbour here, and that we in England shall inherit the evils from which the Continent is rapidly being delivered? (Cheers.) That is a fact which stands to reason. Almost every member of this House knows that foreign monks and foreign nuns come here, some to take direction of establishments already existing, and others to found establishments of their own. Thus we have growing up in this country the very evil at which Henry V., Roman Catholic sovereign of England, in the thirteenth century, aimed a blow by the suppression of the alien monasteries. Is it reasonable, then, to ask us to ignore these facts? That the public do not think it reasonable, is evident from the number of petitions which have been presented to the House. (Hear, hear.) And now I will touch for one

moment on the case of Miss M'Dermot. What is the evidence in that case? It is this. Miss M'Dermot, being then a minor of the age of 15, was withdrawn from the natural protection of her mother, and the case was brought before one of the metropolitan magistrates, Mr. Selfe. He declared that the law did not give him power to enforce the restoration of the child to her parent. In the kindliness of his heart he used more private exertion than, I think, his official and judicial position justified him in doing, to accomplish the object which his humanity dictated—namely, the restoration of the daughter to her mother. The law was in that case violated, and what have we in evidence as to the mode in which it was resisted? Why, those priests who got possession of this young girl calumniated her character and the character of her mother. Now, calumny against the characters of women, for the purpose of coercing them into submission, is a favourite weapon of the priests—(hear, hear)—and if it be not restrained, although I have great trust in the spirit of order among Englishmen, I warn this House lest a violation of peace should be excited. It was only yesterday I received the account of a young man, of 17 years of age, an undergraduate of Cambridge, having been, two years ago, induced to leave his parents' house for the purpose of entering a monastery in a distant county. His brothers heard of it and went to the monastery and told the Superior that, being a minor, they claimed him as his nearest of kin. The Superior would not listen to them, and resisted. The brothers said, "We do not come here to violate the law, but we know you have got our brother in your possession. We have four friends here, and if you do not give him up we will take him." (Cheers and laughter.) The Superior then yielded. If you put a stress of this kind upon Englishmen they will break loose. If an endeavour is made to withhold children from their parents, or a brother being a minor from his elder brothers who stand to him *in loco parentis*, you will find that the English people (as in many cases the American people have done) will take the law into their own hands, regardless of the consequences. (Cheers.) Then there is the case of Miss Ryan. As I believe other members will speak of that, I will not dwell upon it; but it appears she was taken from a conventual establishment in this City, and transferred to a lunatic asylum in Belgium. She screamed, she struggled, she implored assistance from every passer-by; and it is admitted by the Government that those means for testing the sanity or insanity of this poor girl which the law prescribes, had not been complied with. It is stated that Dr. Miller, a distinguished medical practitioner, had given a certificate of insanity, but I have a letter from Dr. Miller to say that he gave no certificate at all. (Hear.) I do not know what the Government mean to do in this case. The corporation of Dover, who very properly interfered when they became cognisant of the facts, have been informed that the law officers of the Crown admit that

the law was violated and set at nought, but they say that it was not done with a bad intention. (Cheers.) These are things which try the patience of Englishmen. (Cheers.) The English of all nations in the world are most orderly and attached to the law; but once let them feel that there is some organisation in this country, especially if it be an organisation with a foreign connection which can defy the law and set an example of lawlessness, and you will find them much more difficult to restrain, because the great characteristic of the English people is their devotion to the ties of family. (Loud cheers.) Once let John Bull put on the bull-dog and you will not find it very easy to make him loose his hold. I would not have ventured to bring this subject before the House if I had no facts which were not known to the House and to the public. These cases of Miss M'Dermot and Miss Ryan are fully before the House; the Government and the public are cognisant of both. But there is a case of graver importance than either of these, of which there is direct and sworn evidence in existence, and of which, I believe, neither the Government, nor the House, nor the public, are cognisant. There are convents in the midland counties; there is one at Princethorpe in North Warwickshire, and under that convent are several underground cells, with very strong doors and very good locks. The man who made these doors and fitted the locks when that convent was built, afterwards worked for me. I speak of the late Mr. Charles Ball, master builder, of Nuneaton. I regret to say that he is now dead; but I know him to have been a trustworthy truth-speaking man. He was at first told that the locks were not good enough, and that he must get better; accordingly he went to Birmingham and procured better locks. (Laughter and cheers.) Yes, I have reason to believe that these were most admirable locks. (A laugh.) Many years ago there was an escape from another convent—that at Atherstone. A poor nun had got across the road and half way across the next field. She was captured and forced back into the convent. Those who lived in the vicinity of the convent became uneasy; and all we can say is that we know that there were 15 cwt. of iron bars afterwards put in the windows of the convent very soon after the escape. The neighbours did not like these ways of going on, and a close watch was maintained. All at once a priest connected with the convent became wonderfully communicative. He said it was quite true that the discipline was infinitely too severe, that he was not in the least surprised that there had been an attempt at escape, that he was going to give up his situation, that he would no longer be connected with such an establishment, that the Order was about to be changed, that nuns of an Order with a less severe discipline were to succeed those whose practices had thus shocked the neighbours, and so the whole community — nuns, priest, confessor, and all— disappeared. Then there was the case at Derby. At Derby the corporation were uneasy because burials were

known to have taken place within the convent walls, while no deaths were registered. The whole case was brought before the corporation and the Home Secretary. The same thing happened as at Atherstone. The community was removed; but something more was done—the convent was pulled down. There is another case, and here I speak from sworn affidavits. In February, 1857, it became known that a nun had escaped from the Benedictine Priory at Colwich, in Staffordshire. She was seen at the back of the convent on the line of railway; she went to the pointsman first, and then to the stationmaster. She was described as dreadfully emaciated, poorly clad, and in the greatest state of terror. She seemed anxious to conceal herself; after some time she went by the railway to Stafford, and at Stafford it fortunately happened that an old general officer was at the station and saw her. She went on to Birmingham; that night a telegraphic message passed up the line to the effect that Dr. Ullathorne would bring her back to the convent. I shall not mention any other names in this case. He did bring her back; and the circumstance of her being brought back closely veiled and closely watched created an uneasiness in the public mind. We do not like these things in the midland counties. This happened not very long after the discovery and conviction of the poisoner Palmer. The Government would not allow us midland counties people to try that man. He was tried in London, coolly, properly, according to due course of law, and hanged. That circumstance produced a good deal of excitement in the neighbourhood, and the people were more watchful in consequence, for the crime was perpetrated at no great distance. There was the most extreme difficulty in procuring evidence in the case of this nun. I have a complete narrative of what was done in the case, written by a person whom I will not name; but he took the matter up in the spirit of an Englishman. I have before me the name of the solicitor who was engaged in the inquiry. This person had never seen this young woman, but he was determined, from all he heard in the neighbourhood, that the circumstances of the case should be brought out. He was assisted on the occasion by the Protestant Alliance in London. Well, the priests and those connected with this convent, when aware of the inquiry, threatened in the most malignant terms every person who might give evidence upon the subject. They obtained the dismissal of the clerk through whom the telegraphic message should have been sent. It was a most happy circumstance that he was absent from his post at the moment the message came to the office, and he had left another person to transmit the message. That person was not bound by the obligation of secrecy, and it was through him that Superintendent Field, the detective officer, found out the name of the poor nun. It was not known for months, and would most probably never have been known had it not been for that happy accident. After Inspector Field

came down the terror which had been excited subsided, and people began to speak out. An application was made to the Court of Queen's Bench for a writ of *Habeas Corpus*. Affidavits were produced, and plans of the premises, all of which are in my possession, together with the primary examination. I would not venture to bring that case before the House on my own authority, but I will read to the House an account of what occurred in the Court of Queen's Bench as it has been drawn up by one of the gentlemen specially engaged in the transaction:—

"The evidence being now complete, an application was made to the Court of Queen's Bench before Mr Justice Wightman on the——day of July. After hearing counsel in support of the case for a writ of *Habeas Corpus*, his lordship expressed his willingness to issue an order to the authorities at the convent to show cause why a writ should not issue. As this, however, would have prematurely opened a discussion in court, the council after a conference, intimated their willingness to abide by his definite decision. His lordship, therefore, promised to take the affidavits home with him to peruse them, and to give his decision in the following week. . . . . .

At the appointed time Justice Wightman stated that he had carefully read the evidence, but that he should have again to defer his decision, as it did not appear that any application had been made at the convent for permission to see Miss——" (this nun).

I will not give her name, or those of others concerned (for I know not whether she is alive or dead), until this House may think fit to appoint a committee, and thus to cast over the witnesses the protection of its authority. The narrative continues that Mr. Justice Wightman said:—

"An application must, therefore, be made for a private interview with her, to ascertain if she were confined against her will; and, if refused, or, the permission being granted, she stated that she was so confined, then he would grant a writ. His lordship said it was a most interesting and uncommon case; but as it was likewise a very important one, it was necessary that great circumspection should be used."

The persons whom the judge commissioned went down to Colwich, and the narrative goes on to say:—

"Having met, we proceeded to the convent, and arrived at the door at 11.35 on the 14th of July. Being opened, I presented my card to the servant, who was dressed in black, and on the request to see Mrs. ——, the Mother Superior, we were shown into the visitors' waiting-room, a large, cheerless apartment, hung round with pictures of saints and small coloured engravings with plain ungilt frames. At the end of the room was a large counter covered with oil-cloth, which entirely reached across the room and divided it into two parts. Behind this was a door. We had been kept waiting for about a quarter of an hour when two nuns entered by the door behind the counter and inquired our business, stating that the Mother Superior

was much engaged. I said that we could not communicate the purport of our visit except to her, upon which they retired, having first requested to be present at the interview. Again we were left alone for about a quarter of an hour, and had ample time to canvass the dress and the manners of the Sisters of the Benedictine Order of Nuns. What we both remarked, apart from their picturesque dress, was the total absence of soul or animated expression in their faces. There was a coldness and want of feeling in their manner which comported well with the appearance of the place, but it failed to impress or interest us in their behalf. If there was happiness in their hearts the outward and visible sign was sadly wanting. After waiting what appeared to us a long time, Mrs. ——, the Mother Superior, entered, accompanied by two nuns. After saying that I presumed I was addressing the Mother Superior, to which she nodded assent, I told her that we had called as friends of Miss —— ——, and should be glad to be permitted to see her. She immediately replied that —— —— was not there, as she had left the convent several months before—early in May. I affected surprise, and inquired where she had gone to. Without hesitation she replied that she left there for a convent at Staplehill, near Wimborne, Dorsetshire; that she was not very well, and thought a change would be desirable. I expressed regret at not seeing her, and inquired particularly about her health, and whether she had heard from her. 'Oh, yes,' she replied, 'I have received several letters from her, in which she describes the happiness which she enjoys in her new abode, and thanking me repeatedly for the undeviating kindness which she experienced while being here; the undeviating kindness;'—repeating the words, but addressing me—'perhaps you would like to see her letters, she writes in such excellent spirits.' I thanked her for her courtesy, but assured her it was sufficient to know from her that my friend was happy, and again in the enjoyment of health. Alluding again, to her leaving there, the Mother Superior said that Miss —— seemed to like a change, for she had been in several convents. After taking down the address, in case I might wish to write to her, we retired, thanking the Mother Superior for her kindness; for the object of the visit being accomplished, so far as it could be, I was desirous of avoiding any questions, as they might have been inconvenient to answer."

According to the directions received from Mr. Justice Wightman, all these facts were reported to him, and he desired that the persons engaged in the inquiry should proceed to the convent of Staplehill, near Wimborne, in Dorsetshire. They were the aged general officer who first saw the nun, his wife—a lady eminently qualified for the mission of charity which she undertook—and the gentleman who had written the account. They found at Staplehill a convent of apparently a totally different description. They had an interview with the nun, which the narrative from which I have these extracts describes as follows:—

"So I said 'Miss ——, I have no time for trifling. When I tell you that for months past I have had but one object in view to serve you, and if possible to come to your rescue, and to accomplish this interview it has cost me nearly one hundred pounds in my efforts to trace you, I think you will admit that, although I am a perfect stranger to you, I am at least entitled to your candour.' I shall not easily forget the earnest look which she gave me. 'Oh, how can I thank you enough,' she replied; 'I did not know I had such a friend.' . . . I then particularly inquired what her wish was, as if she still wished to leave the convent there was no law to prevent her doing so; and I promised her immediate assistance if she was confined against her will. 'No,' she said, 'I have no wish to leave now. Since I came here I have been treated so kindly it would be ingratitude in me to leave. The nuns here have treated me like a sister. No. I cannot leave now.' Again she repeated—'No, I cannot, I must not leave now. I embraced the convent life and took the veil at the early age of eighteen, with the earnest desire of devoting my best years to God, and serving Him in a way I then considered most for His glory, and I cannot now turn my back upon Him.' I saw that her resolution was taken, and that it was vain to attempt to shake it. It appeared likewise to be a relief to her, as if she had now time to arrange her thoughts, and she quietly said, 'What could I do if I left; all my relations and friends are Roman Catholics, and they would turn their backs upon me, and what do I know of life?'"

Now, this is a happy conclusion. This nun, who, according to the description given in the affidavits, was, at the period of her escape, emaciated, terror-stricken, who had clambered over a wall and dropped nine or ten feet from it, who had fled across the fields, been pursued, captured and returned to the convent, is found here completely changed in appearance, comfortable, and happy. But, sir, this is not the whole of the case. It will naturally be inquired why this nun should have escaped. And after it was known that the protection of English law would be extended to the inquiry by the authority of the Court of Queen's Bench, facts came out of which I will now give the House an indication. After the conversation with this nun at Staplehill had proceeded to the point I have mentioned, the person authorised by the judge to make the inquiry says:—

"I then informed her of the many affidavits which had been prepared with a view to obtaining a writ of *Habeas Corpus* if I had been denied that meeting, which very much astonished and amused her, and that very important evidence had been obtained respecting certain doings in the convent at Colwich. I carefully marked the expression of her face, which at once assumed a very thoughtful aspect. I said, 'Miss ——, it has been stated to us on oath that there are certain subterraneous cells at the convent called grottoes; have you seen them?' She was silent. I asked again, 'Do you remember a girl named

——?' She thought for a moment, and then asked if she was not a scholar in the convent school; she thought she had some recollection of her, but it was several years since she was there. I then said that the late scholar had stated that she had seen a nun put into a cellar under the convent, and that she was found dead there; and, I asked, have you any knowledge that such was the case?' She remained silent. I say that silence was equivalent to an admission, and asked again, 'Have you ever seen a nun put into a cellar?' Again she was silent. I did not press her further again on this point, as her resolute silence was to all of us sufficient proof of the truthfulness of the scholar's statement."

That statement was, and it stands in the affidavits, that the greatest severities were practised in that convent—that she had seen nuns imprisoned—that she had known them to be kept short of food—that she had seen one nun forced down into this underground cell—that to the best of her belief she never came out alive—that she attended the service at her funeral, and saw her consigned to the grave in the convent burying-ground. Now this evidence is corroborated by a large part of the evidence given of the 27 witnesses who were examined upon the subject. It was proved that there were more burials within the precincts of the convent than appeared in the register of deaths. It was proved that coffins were seldom made outside the convent, but that rough carpenters were employed within the establishment to make packing-cases, without any of the usual appurtenances, in which the bodies were committed to the grave. It is known that the most malignant threats were used by persons connected with the convent against the production of the slightest evidence. It is a fact, that, until Inspector Field came down, few of the witnesses who signed the affidavits could be induced to speak. I now ask whether I have not stated enough to induce the House to grant a committee to ascertain the character of these establishments. The convent at Colwich, down to the year 1857, was a cloistered convent of one of the severest Orders. The convent of Wimborne seemed to be a happy home; but what does that prove against the necessity for inquiry? Nothing; if there be other convents which realise and deserve Liguori's description, and are real "hells upon earth" to unwilling nuns! Such are the facts I am prepared to prove by the production of the affidavits. I ask the House respectfully to grant this committee, for the purpose of ascertaining the locality, the character, and the increase of these establishments. I do not ask the House to appoint this committee for the purpose of even suggesting a remedy, but in order to furnish the House with information which might enable it in its wisdom to devise some means for the better protection of those who, in too many cases, are, I fear, helpless women. (Marked cheering.)

After a debate of some length, Mr. Newdegate's amendment was lost on a division—79 members voting for it, and 106 against it.